

CLAIMS:

I claim:

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1. A method for assisting a user in identifying a subfamily of items within a family of items, comprising the steps of:

- 10 (a) providing a computer readable data file of stored information representing at least one family of items, said data file identifying at least one alternative for each item,
- (b) reading said data file,
- (c) displaying a feature screen indicating said alternatives represented in the family,
- (d) accepting at least one selected alternative,
- 15 (e) determining the subfamily of items wherein each said item in the subfamily satisfies said selected alternatives,
- (f) determining available alternatives represented in the subfamily and unavailable alternatives
- 20 unrepresented in the subfamily, and
- (g) revising said feature screen indicating said available alternatives as distinct from said unavailable alternatives.

25 2. The method according to claim 1 wherein each family has at least one feature associated therewith and further comprising the step of:

30 displaying at least one grouping wherein each said grouping comprises one of said features visually related to respective alternatives.

35 3. The method according to claim 2 wherein respective alternatives within one of said groupings are mutually exclusive of each other. (unintentional)

4. The method according to claim 1 and further comprising the steps of:

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modifying said selected alternatives and repeating the steps of accepting said selected alternatives, determining the subfamily, determining said available alternatives, and revising said feature screen.

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5. The method according to claim 4 wherein said selected alternatives are automatically modified by deselecting a most recently selected alternative if the subfamily comprises zero items.

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6. The method according to claim 1 and further comprising the step of:

indicating the number of items in the subfamily.

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7. The method according to claim 1 and further comprising the steps of:

displaying said available alternatives in a first format and displaying unavailable alternatives in a second format.

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8. The method according to claim 7 and further comprising the step of:

displaying said selected alternatives in a third format.

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9. The method according to claim 8 wherein said first format is a bold font and said second format is a grey shaded font and said third format is a bold and underlined font.

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10. The method according to claim 2 and further comprising the step of:

providing an interactive pointer and displaying information specific to one of said features upon a user initiated signal when said pointer is pointing to a feature caption on said feature screen.

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11. The method according to claim 2 wherein at least one of said groupings is hidden from view if all said respective alternatives are also unavailable alternatives.

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12. The method according to claim 2 wherein at least one of said groupings comprises a trigger alternative, and further comprising the step of:

displaying a dependant grouping only if said trigger alternative is one of said selected alternatives.

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13. The method according to claim 2 further comprising the step of:

automatically selecting one of said available alternatives if all remaining respective alternatives are unavailable alternatives.

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14. The method according to claim 1 wherein, the steps of providing a computer readable data file, reading said data file, and determining said subfamily are executed on a server and wherein, the steps of displaying said feature screen, accepting said selected alternatives, and revising said feature screen are executed on a client and further wherein, said server is accessible by said client.

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15. The method according to claim 14 and further comprising the steps of:

said server receiving from said client a feature screen code and said selected alternatives, and

said server sending to said client a feature screen status. (imp. - innovation in status sent to user so apparently in session even tho not actually happening)

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16. The method according to claim 15 wherein, said feature screen status comprises:

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(c) accepting at least one selected alternative,

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(f) revising said feature screen to ~~reflect~~ said available alternatives as distinct from said unavailable alternatives.

18. The method according to claim 17 wherein, each said available alternative is displayed in a first format, each said unavailable alternative is displayed in a second format, and each said selected alternative is displayed in a third format.

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displaying at least one grouping, each said grouping comprising one of said features visually related to respective alternatives.

5 21. The method according to claim 20 wherein, if said grouping does not contain at least one available alternative, said grouping is not displayed.

10 22. The method according to claim 17 further comprising the step of:

displaying a plurality of pictures, each said picture representing one family and being selectable by a user to identify one family.

15 23. The method according to claim 17 further comprising the step of:

displaying an alphanumeric list of entries, each said entry representing one family and being selectable by a user to identify one family.

20 24. The method according to claim 17 further comprising the step of:

providing a user input area and receiving an alphanumeric reference for identifying a family.

25 25. The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a user selector for each item of said subfamily,

30 (b) receiving a signal identifying a single item within said subfamily, and

(c) displaying additional information about said item.

35 26. The method of claim 25 wherein said additional information comprises detailed specifications concerning said item.

27. The method of claim 25 wherein said additional information comprises a pictorial representation of said single member.

5 28. The method of claim 25 wherein said additional information comprises related items.

29. A system for assisting a user in identifying a subfamily of items within a family of items, comprising:

10 (a) a computer having memory, a display device, a user input device, and an interactive pointer,

SqK (b) a computer readable data file stored in said memory, said data file representing at least one family of items and identifying at least one alternative for each item,

15 (c) a feature screen displayed on said display device, said feature screen indicating available alternatives represented in the family,

20 (d) said user input device accepting at least one selected alternative, wherein said computer determines a subfamily of items wherein each said item in said subfamily contains said selected alternatives, and further wherein, said display device revises said feature screen ^{to display} ~~indicating~~ said available alternatives ^{as distinct from} ~~and~~ unavailability represented in the subfamily ~~and~~ unavailability alternatives unrepresented in the subfamily.

SqK 30 30. The system according to claim 29 wherein, said computer having said computer readable data file comprises a server computer accessible by a client computer having said display device, said user input device, and said interactive pointer.

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